

# **RAILFUTURE**

campaigning by the Railway Development Society

[www.railfuture.org.uk](http://www.railfuture.org.uk)

## **A I R P O R T   L I N K S**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This report aims to stimulate debate on public transport links to and from UK airports. It seeks to highlight examples of good practice and to review the potential for improvement, with or without new rail links at airports.

Railfuture aims primarily to promote and defend railways and rail travel and we therefore advocate the development of high-speed trains as an alternative to many short-haul flights. However, there are also many journeys for which air is the obvious mode and so we also need accessible airports.

It is therefore necessary to tackle congestion around airports and reduce the carbon footprint of travellers. If the space taken up by large car parks at airports can be reduced, that also frees up land for more productive use. Airports also provide employment for many people and efficient public transport links to the airport therefore have a commuter role as well.

The report has been compiled by members of the Railfuture International Committee, drawing on local information and experiences provided by the society's Branches and members in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It does not attempt to give an exhaustive view on the current situation, but is based on a simple collection of data from some 28 airports, ranging from the large ones such as London Heathrow to the small ones such as Humberside.

Our findings show a huge variation in the quality of public transport access to UK airports, ranging from those with excellent all-round provision such as London Gatwick to those with relatively poor provision such as Norwich.

While most airports have bus and coach services calling or terminating at their front door", relatively few have the same "front door" access by rail. A significant number of airports with supposed access to rail do not enjoy the "front door" access that they do with buses and coaches. All too often the passenger using a train to get to or from an airport has to take a taxi or bus link to or from the station. A good example of this situation is to be found with the development of East Midlands Airport and its rail connection at East Midlands Airport Parkway station.

## RAIL CONNECTIONS

Obviously, Railfuture's main concern is with rail connections to airports. Of the airports which we studied, 19 had some rail access. The type and quality of rail access varied considerably and is summarised below. The full table is printed as an appendix to this report.

The data collected considered four types of rail link: inter-city / long-distance; regional / inter-urban; local; and metro. Grouping together the inter-city and regional, and the local and metro, the situation can be summarised thus:

	IC / Regional	Local / metro
Aberdeen Dyce	x	x
Belfast George Best		x
Birmingham International	x	x
Blackpool		x
Cardiff International		x
Durham Tees Valley		x
East Midlands	x	x
Glasgow Prestwick	x	x
Humberside		x
Liverpool John Lennon		x
London City		x
London Gatwick	x	x
London Heathrow		x
London Luton	x	x
London Stansted	x	x
Manchester	x	x
Newcastle International		x
Southampton	x	x
Southend Rochford	x	x

In most of the above cases, the link between railway and airport is by bus or taxi. In some cases the airport is some distance from the rail line. The journey between Humberside Airport and Barnetby station is an example. In some instances the rail link is sufficiently far off to be of limited use.

At some small airports, there may not be enough business to justify a dedicated bus link to a rail link. The availability of taxis in such cases must however be advertised.

On the other hand, Aberdeen Dyce, Birmingham International and Southampton are close to their respective stations. London City, London Gatwick, London Heathrow, London Stansted, Manchester and Newcastle have rail services directly next to the airport.

Of these, London Heathrow and Newcastle have direct services only into their respective city centres. In spite of the Piccadilly Line extensions, and the development of Heathrow Express and Heathrow Connect services into the airport, London Heathrow is not yet directly served by Inter City or regional services.

For a considerable number of people, the only practicable public transport access to London Heathrow is still by bus or coach. Given Heathrow's location and importance to the traveller, it is surprising that more effort is not being made to link the airport with a loop in both directions to the Great Western Main Line.

In the case of Newcastle, the metro link serving the city centre and all points in between is less of a problem. Indeed, recent restructuring of Tyne & Wear Metro services with Airport trains going to Sunderland and South Hylton may turn out to have enhanced the rail link to the airport from across Tyne & Wear.

Only London Gatwick, London Heathrow and London Stansted have dedicated rail services. All other rail services for airports are part of the national network.

Railfuture notes with regret that the prospect of linking Edinburgh Turnhouse and Glasgow International to the rail network has been damaged by the Scottish Parliament. Edinburgh will, however, be connected by the new tramway. The proposal for a dedicated rail link to Glasgow International Airport has been scrapped and at the time of writing there is no prospect of this scheme being revived.

Best practice in terms of rail connection could be defined in the following way:

- \* The airport station being part of, or immediately adjacent to, the airport complex, allowing passengers easy transfer.
- \* The airport station being served by long-distance, regional and local services.
- \* Rail offering a variety of destinations other than its primary city..
- \* Rail services running a fairly high frequency service seven days a week.
- \* Minimum hourly frequency for long-distance services.

At the time of writing, the examples of best practice in terms of rail connections are:

- \* Birmingham International
- \* London Gatwick
- \* London Stansted
- \* Manchester
- \* Southampton

## BUS AND COACH CONNECTIONS

Almost all the airports for which we received branch comments had bus links into their respective city centres. 10 had coach connections, often provided by National Express, that link the airports with other parts of the country.

Humberside alone appeared to have no bus or coach connection. Norwich International Airport only has a bus service on Sundays and Public Holidays into the centre of Norwich, although there is a fairly frequent bus service running close by for the rest of the week. There is no direct bus link to the railway station.

The quality of these bus and coach links varies widely. The best often occur at those airports where there are already good rail links. An example of this provision is London Stansted Airport, which will be considered separately.

In some cases the bus services follow a commonly observed practice of running fairly frequent services between 07.00 and 19.00 Mondays to Saturdays, and either scant or no service in the evening or on Sundays and Public Holidays. Aberdeen Dyce is an example of this pattern.

## STANSTED AIRPORT BUS AND COACH CONNECTIONS

Regular bus services connect this airport with Bishops Stortford, Braintree and Chelmsford seven days a week. In the case of Braintree and Chelmsford, frequency falls from hourly to about every two hours in the evening (not Chelmsford) and on Sundays and Public Holidays.

In addition, National Express has regular coach services linking the airport several times a day with Birmingham (including Birmingham International Airport), Brighton, Cambridge, Coventry, Leicester, London Gatwick Airport, London Heathrow Airport, Luton (including London Luton Airport), Milton Keynes, Norwich, Nottingham, Oxford and Wolverhampton. Other operators provide coach links to, for example, Ipswich and Colchester.

London is particularly well served by coaches from Stansted, including services which terminate next door to both Liverpool Street and Stratford stations. There is no doubt that much of this provision is due to intense competition between National Express, who provide the Stansted Express train service and National Express who run the A6 and A7 to Victoria Coach Station, the A9 to Stratford station and the A50 to Liverpool Street station. In addition, Easybus runs a service to Baker Street station. All the National Express coaches run 24/7 and offer considerably lower fares than National Express Stansted Express - surely something to be looked at by the Competition Commission?

## PUBLIC TRANSPORT ACCESS TO SMALLER AIRPORTS

Most of the smaller airports are not well located in terms of access by public transport. Foot passengers must almost always access these airports by taxi.

However, our survey included public transport access to two of these smaller airports, namely Gloucestershire and Southend Rochford. Each handles well under 100,000 passengers per year.

Gloucestershire Airport is situated between Gloucester and Cheltenham near Junction 11 of the M5 motorway. There is no direct public transport connection. Although local buses pass by, these are very infrequent after 18.00 Mondays to Saturdays and all day Sundays. Almost certainly the foot passengers will have to use a taxi between the airport and Gloucester or Cheltenham.

Southend Rochford Airport is situated on the northern edge of Southend-on-Sea and is well served by buses seven days a week into both Southend and Rochford, both of which are also served by a frequent train service into London Liverpool Street. Indeed it is also possible, by changing trains at Shenfield, to reach several other important towns in Essex and beyond. For its size, this airport is therefore relatively well served.

Some information has also been received about London Oxford (formerly Kidlington) Airport. As with most of the smaller airports, it is not well located for public transport. The nearest stations are at Oxford (6 miles), Tackley (4 miles) and Hanborough (3 miles). Tackley and Hanborough have relatively infrequent train services (typically one train every two hours). One of our members did, however, access the airport by alighting at Hanborough station and calling a taxi.

## OTHER ISSUES

In almost all cases, the train and bus services are as reliable as those for the rest of the country. They do not necessarily have enough capacity to take air travellers' luggage. This is normally only guaranteed when there are dedicated rail or coach services.

Most of the airports for which we received information carried publicity material for connections by rail, bus and coach. Some Train Operating Companies publicise their links to airports in their own material, including timetables. We were also impressed by a leaflet issued by East Midlands Trains encouraging customers to go by rail (and sometimes connecting bus) to the airports in their area. However, not all TOCs seem to be as keen as this one to publicise their airport links.

In the case of Cardiff International Airport, there is through train/bus ticketing for customers who catch the airport bus from Cardiff Central or Barry stations (which are served by more trains than Rhoose, the station closest to the airport). That is an example of good practice which could be followed elsewhere.

In North Wales, however, concern was expressed at unsatisfactory train connections for local people and visitors using Manchester or Liverpool John Lennon Airports. There is room for improvement here, since these are the obvious airports for North Wales, which is itself an important tourist region.

Belfast George Best Airport is close to Sydenham rail station on the Bangor line but is also served by the service 600 bus which goes direct to the Europa Buscentre, Belfast International Airport also has a direct coach link, and the Europa Buscentre, as well as being in the centre of the city, is also part of the same complex as Great Victoria Street Rail Station. Therefore, onward travel by train or bus to most places in Northern Ireland is easy; and the airport links are well promoted in the excellent "Travelling with Translink" booklet.

City of Derry Airport is close to the railway line but has never had a station. It is used by 440,000 passengers per year and has bus links to both Londonderry and Coleraine.

There are certainly some missed opportunities. National Express East Anglia, for example, does not publicise how easy it is to travel from Norwich to Stansted by rail, using the very successful Norwich - Cambridge direct train service, which for most of the day has good connections into and out of Cross Country's Birmingham New Street to Stansted Airport service at either Cambridge or Ely.

It must not be assumed that people will always want to use their local airport. Indeed, better rail links to more airports can give passengers more flexibility and help reverse the current policy of airport expansion.

## CONCLUSION

It is clear that more thought must be given to how foot passengers can access airports which do not have good rail and/or bus/coach connections. It is often forgotten that between 25% and 30% of UK households do not have regular access to a car.

Customers need to be encouraged, by promotions and advertising, to use the existing public transport links to airports. That applies to visitors to the UK as well as to our own citizens. For example, a town that is on a direct rail link to an international airport should surely highlight this on its website and in its tourist brochures and other promotional material. Accessibility by means other than the motor car should also be a selling point for the airport itself,

Our survey did not cover visitors from abroad, but it would be useful to investigate how much they are told in advance about onward travel from the airport at which they will land; and whether the information is in other major languages as well as English.

Franchise remits for would-be Train Operating Companies could also surely address this issue? Bidders should be expected to state how they would seek to increase rail's share of the traffic to and from airports in their area.

There is apparently no coherent policy on connecting the UK's airports to other public transport and especially rail, either on the part of government, the British Airports Authority or the Train Operating Companies. Little consideration is given to rail's capacity to help reduce the traffic congestion one sees all too often around the larger UK airports.

Overall, our findings show that airport development and rail development do need to be planned together.

## NOTES TO APPENDIX

The Appendix summarises replies received from Railfuture Branches and some individual members in 2009.

We have awarded airports scores out of 30, in the final column, according to the extent and quality of their public transport access.

These scores obviously do not relate to the efficiency or customer-friendliness of the airport itself.

Our scoring system considered whether the airport was on a through intercity, regional or local rail route, or whether the route terminated there; and the frequency of the service. It was possible to score a maximum of 5 for intercity and regional links, 4 for local links.

For bus and coach links, it was possible to score a maximum of 4 each, with, for example, one point for a bus or coach to a railhead and another point for one to a town or city centre.

For Underground, metro and tram links, we awarded a maximum of 4, including 2 points if the frequency was at least every 15 minutes.

We also considered if the links were mentioned in publicity produced by the airport and by the Train Operating Company.

It would obviously be possible to give every airport a star rating according to its score. Such a star rating would need to reflect a more complex study than ours, however; and could also take account negatives (such as lack of public transport links for all scheduled flights; difficulties in ticket purchase etc.). It could also consider innovations such as combined rail/air tickets - as offered for some airports in Switzerland and Germany.

Finally, we would not expect links to a small airport to be as good or comprehensive as those for a very large airport - unless the very small airport happens to be alongside a main line railway. However, certain small airports in our survey do seem to be better served by public transport than some larger ones!

We shall also welcome further information on access to these airports, especially from customers who use them, with a view to producing a more detailed report at a later date.

The survey results were analysed by Howard Thomas, who produced this report with assistance from Trevor Garrod.

Thanks are also due to many Railfuture members and Branches who provided useful information via the survey.

Visit the Railfuture website [www.railfuture.org.uk](http://www.railfuture.org.uk) for the latest campaigning news.

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February 2010

## Railfuture

### International & European Committee

#### Survey on public transport access to airports in the UK

Airport ↓	Criterion ?	Passenger volume (k) 2008-2009	Inter-city rail	Regional rail	Local rail	Coach stn/city	Bus stn/city	Tram/metro stn/city	Publicity re pub trans	Publicity by TOC re pub tr	Pub trans links reliable	Room for luggage	Totals
<b>ABZ</b>	Aberdeen Dyce	3,290	0	4	4	0	4	0	1	1	1	1	16
<b>BHD</b>	Belfast George Best	2,571			4		4	0			1		9
<b>BFS</b>	Belfast International	5,223				4		0			1		5
<b>BHX</b>	Birmingham International	9,577	5	5	4		4	0			1	1	20
	Blackpool	439	0	0	3	0	4	0	1	1	1	1	11
	Bournemouth	1,079											
<b>BRS</b>	Bristol International	6,229	0	0	0	4		0	1	1	1	1	8
<b>CWL</b>	Cardiff	1,979			3		3			1	1	1	9
	Durham Tees Valley	645	0	3	2	4		0	1	0	1	1	12
<b>EMA</b>	East Midlands	5,616	5	4	3	4	4	0	1	1	1	1	24
<b>EDI</b>	Edinburgh Turnhouse	8,992	0	0	0	0	4	0	1	1	1	1	8
	Exeter	951					3						3
<b>GLA</b>	Glasgow International	8,135	0	0	0	0	4	0	1	1	1	1	8
<b>PIK</b>	Glasgow Prestwick	2,414	0	3	4			0	1	1	1	1	11
	Gloucestershire	20	0	0	0	0	0	0					0
	Humberside	424	0	4	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	9
	Inverness	671											
<b>LBA</b>	Leeds-Bradford	2,860	0	0	0	4	4	0		1	1	1	11
<b>LPL</b>	Liverpool John Lennon	5,330	0	3	4	3	4	0	1	1	1	1	18
<b>LCY</b>	London City	3,260	0	0	0	4	4	4	1	1	1	1	16
<b>LGW</b>	London Gatwick	34,162	5	5	4	4	4	0	1	1	1	1	26
<b>LHR</b>	London Heathrow	66,907	0	0	4	4	4	4	1	1	1	1	20
<b>LTN</b>	London Luton	10,174	4	4	4			0	1	1	1	1	16
<b>STN</b>	London Stansted	22,340	4	4	4	4	4	0	1	1	1	1	24
<b>MAN</b>	Manchester	21,063	4	4	4		4	0	1	1	1	1	20
<b>NCL</b>	Newcastle International	5,017	0	0	0	0	4	4	1	1	1	1	12
<b>NWI</b>	Norwich International	583	0	0	0		4	0			1	1	6
	Robin Hood	968					3			1			4
<b>SOU</b>	Southampton	1,946	5	5	4		4	0	1	1	1	1	22
	Southend Rochford	44	0	5	4	0	4	0	1	0	1	1	16